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Brian Edgar

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# "Condemned to be Free"

## The Dilemmas of Canadian Civilians in Japanese-Occupied Hong Kong

BRIAN EDGAR

*Abstract: Enemy occupation after military defeat is generally seen as a situation in which the defeated are deprived of choices. This is obviously correct, but it is also true that they are sometimes faced with dilemmas harsher and more significant than those of peacetime. The study of the experience of Canadian civilians during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong casts light on some of these dilemmas. This article begins with an account of the Hong Kong Canadians on the eve of war, showing them to consist of two distinct but linked communities—the Chinese and the European. It goes on to describe some of the Canadian contributions to the defence of Hong Kong, before proceeding to its central concern: an analysis of the choices made by individuals during the occupation.*

"Human beings are condemned to be free...they are not free to abandon their freedom."<sup>1</sup>

— Jean-Paul Sartre, writing during the German occupation of France

IT IS NATURAL that the fate of the 1,975 Canadian soldiers who fought in the Battle of Hong Kong should have attracted considerable interest from historians. Much less attention, however, has been given to the experience of Canadian civilians caught up in the Japanese invasion. This grouping consisted of a Chinese Canadian majority and

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 439. Translation adjusted by author.

about ninety “Europeans.”<sup>2</sup> After the British surrender, the Chinese were spared internment, something which actually gave them a harsher experience than their co-nationals. Most of the European Canadians were consigned to Stanley Camp on the southwest peninsula of Hong Kong Island, where, after the repatriation of the Americans in June 1942, they formed the second largest non-British contingent (after the Irish). Previous scholarly discussion of European Canadians has focused mainly on the notable cases of Morris Cohen and Francis Kendall<sup>3</sup> while more representative stories have been generally ignored. Hong Kong’s Canadian Chinese community in peacetime has received almost no historical attention, but its experiences in war have been well served by Marjorie Wong in *The Dragon and The Maple Leaf: Chinese Canadians in World War II*.<sup>4</sup> Wong’s work is thorough and meticulous, but her focus is generally on those involved in military or quasi-military organisations, so some significant stories remain untold, especially of women like Daisy Woo and Fan Lee. In addition, the emergence of new sources necessitates fresh accounts of figures like George Chow and William Gun Chong. Finally, the study of both Canadian communities throws light on a neglected aspect of the experience of occupation: defeat in war is a situation in which the losers are deprived of many of their usual choices, but it is also one in which they are sometimes faced with dilemmas of an intensity rare in peace time.

<sup>2</sup> This designation was general in pre-war Hong Kong as a synonym for “white.”

<sup>3</sup> Daniel S. Levy, *Two-Gun Cohen: A Biography* (New York: Inkwell Publishing, 2015), Kindle edition. There is some discussion of Thomas Monaghan in Brian Edgar, “Steering Neutral? The Un-interned Irish Community in Occupied Hong Kong,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch* 57 (2017): 79-80. For Kendall, see footnote 4.

<sup>4</sup> Marjorie Wong, *The Dragon and the Maple Leaf: Chinese Canadians in World War II* (London, ON: Pirie Publishing, 1994). Wong (78-79, 123 ff.) also provides an extended account of Francis Woodley Kendall, who played an important role recruiting Canadian Chinese from British Columbia. For a more recent discussion, see Bernd Horn, *A Most Ungentlemanly Way of War: The SOE and the Canadian Connection* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2016). In view of this existing literature, my discussion of Kendall is brief.

### CANADIANS IN PRE-WAR HONG KONG: TWO SEPARATE BUT LINKED COMMUNITIES

The majority of Canadian civilians in Hong Kong in the years before the Second World War were of Chinese ethnicity.<sup>5</sup> While the number of European Canadians can be estimated with reasonable precision as about ninety on the eve of the Japanese attack, the number of Chinese citizens is much harder to ascertain. The Canadian Chinese Club had its own clubhouse, fielded two softball teams and attracted 500 people to one of its annual dinners<sup>6</sup>—but not all the diners were Canadian or Chinese. A very rough estimate of 200 to 250 adults is in line with the sources consulted for this article.

#### CHINESE CANADIANS

The Canadian Chinese Club was formed in 1934 and, according to the founder and first president Lee Yook-tong,<sup>7</sup> the main aim was to cultivate “good fellowship” among Chinese returned from Canada.<sup>8</sup> It also seems to have acted as a source of assistance for people new to the colony.<sup>9</sup> The 1923 Chinese Immigration Act,<sup>10</sup> the culmination of measures that limited both Chinese immigrants and the economic opportunities available to those already in Canada, effectively put a stop to future arrivals.<sup>11</sup> Extended families could no longer re-unite in Canada, while professional opportunities for those already there were further narrowed by the onset of the world economic slump in 1929. Discrimination extended to the level of relief payments and Canada’s Chinese population fell by almost 12,000 in the decade after 1931.<sup>12</sup> In 1924 there were already enough Chinese Canadians in Hong

<sup>5</sup> “Canada in Hongkong,” *South China Morning Post* [SCMP], 1 July 1947, 6.

<sup>6</sup> “Canadian Chinese,” *SCMP*, 16 November 1936, 11.

<sup>7</sup> “Chinese Agent for C. P. S. [Canadian Pacific Steamships],” *SCMP*, 11 December 1940, 9.

<sup>8</sup> “Canadian Chinese,” *SCMP*, 11 September 1935, 3.

<sup>9</sup> “Dominion Day,” *SCMP*, 2 July 1937, 9.

<sup>10</sup> Often referred to as the Chinese Exclusion Act.

<sup>11</sup> Stephanie D. Bangarth, “‘We are not asking you to open wide the gates for Chinese immigration’: The Committee for the Repeal of the Chinese Immigration Act and Early Human Rights Activism in Canada,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 84, 3 (September 2003): 395.

<sup>12</sup> Wong, *The Dragon and the Maple Leaf*, 11.

Kong for the *South China Morning Post* to note with satisfaction that there had been no demonstrations in the colony of the kind that had accompanied news of the Immigration Act in Canada.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, evidence suggests that the majority of the group left Canada for Hong Kong in the 1930s to escape discrimination in a contracting jobs market. This conclusion is in line with Sophie Loy-Wilson’s study of Australian Chinese reverse migration, which provides evidence of a similar response to the depression in a fall of about eleven per cent of Chinese in the Australian population between 1931 and 1936.<sup>14</sup>

The Hong Kong the Canadian Chinese were migrating to was at least as racist as the country they were leaving. Wage rates in both government and private employment were often set according to ethnicity and many of the British—who occupied most of the senior government positions—did not regard even other Europeans as their equals and generally held a set of prejudiced stereotypes regarding the Asian majority.<sup>15</sup> Why then did so many Canadian Chinese choose the colony? The economic picture belied the neat categories of colonial racism; the majority of great fortunes were Asian and the most dynamic sector of the economy comprised Chinese-owned industrial enterprises.<sup>16</sup> Reverse migration to Hong Kong was attractive because work prospects remained good until 1933, when the global depression finally arrived in the colony and, although they plummeted for more than two years, they improved consistently from late 1935.<sup>17</sup> Returned Canadians usually spoke better English than even Chinese educated in British schools,<sup>18</sup> so they could, for example, seek employment in financial institutions which serviced all communities. Doctors could avoid discriminatory pay scales through private practice and other

<sup>13</sup> “Chinese in Canada,” *SCMP*, 9 July 1924, 9.

<sup>14</sup> Sophie Loy-Wilson, *Australians in Shanghai: Race, Rights and Nation in Treaty Port China* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 36.

<sup>15</sup> Catherine S. Chan, *The Macanese Diaspora in British Hong Kong: A Century of Transimperial Drifting* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2021), 193; and Philip Snow, *The Fall of Hong Kong* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 2-3.

<sup>16</sup> Tak-Wing Ngo, “Industrial history and the artifice of laissez-faire colonialism,” in *Hong Kong’s History: State and Society under Colonial Rule*, ed. Tak-Wing Ngo (London: Routledge, 1999), 123 ff.

<sup>17</sup> “Imports and Exports,” *Hong Kong Blue Book for the Year 1933* (Hong Kong: Noronha and Company, 1934), S2-S3; and “Imports and Exports,” *Hong Kong Blue Book for the Year 1937* (Hong Kong: Noronha and Company, 1938), S1-S2.

<sup>18</sup> “Passport Racket,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 18 February 1939, 3.

professionals could work in the substantial Chinese and Eurasian sector of the economy. Those with useful skills could start their own businesses or try their luck in European-dominated firms like the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR).<sup>19</sup>

The Canadian Chinese Club sought to foster good relations with "all other communities,"<sup>20</sup> which suggests that they saw themselves as a grouping distinct from European Canadians. This is hardly surprising, given the racial separation in both Canada and Hong Kong, but this does not mean that the Chinese were unpatriotic or isolationist. The Club acknowledged the help of the Canadian Trade Commissioner, Major V. E. Duclos,<sup>21</sup> and European Canadians were present at most events, formal and informal.<sup>22</sup> In 1936 the Club organised Dominion Day celebrations, becoming the only organisation in the colony to do so. Its President, George Luke Chow, referred to Canada as the "land of our hearts" and, in what was probably a deliberate piece of messaging, Chow proposed a toast to the King while Lieutenant Colonel (Lt.-Col.) Doughty, the Canadian Immigration Officer, offered one to the Republic of China.<sup>23</sup> There were no apparent conflicts in this triple loyalty—to Canada, to China and to Hong Kong as part of the British Empire—especially after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in July 1937. In September of that year the Club joined other Chinese organisations on an Emergency Relief Council providing services for Nationalist soldiers in transit<sup>24</sup> and in 1939 it used its annual dinner dance to raise money for both the British War Organization Fund and the Chinese Red Cross.<sup>25</sup>

Although the Club resident was always male, women served in other committee positions. There were two female secretaries in 1935<sup>26</sup> and female vice presidents in 1939, 1940 and 1941.<sup>27</sup> In fact, the community included a number of successful female professionals. Daisy Eleanor Woo was the first Canadian-born Chinese woman to

<sup>19</sup> Sometimes referred to as Canadian Pacific Steamships.

<sup>20</sup> "Straight Talk," *SCMP*, 17 November 1941, 1.

<sup>21</sup> "Canadian Chinese," *SCMP*, 11 February 1936, 14.

<sup>22</sup> "Local and General," *SCMP*, 23 June 1936, 2; and "Canadian Chinese," *SCMP*, 3 November 1934, 11.

<sup>23</sup> "Dominion Day," *SCMP*, 3 July 1936, 9.

<sup>24</sup> "War Relief Work," *SCMP*, 22 September 1937, 12.

<sup>25</sup> "Canadian Chinese," *Hong Kong Telegraph [HT]*, 18 November 1939, 8.

<sup>26</sup> "Canadian Chinese," *SCMP*, 11 September 1935, 3.

<sup>27</sup> "Canadian Chinese," *HT*, 3 September 1939, 2; and "Canadian Chinese," *SCMP*, 16 September 1941, 4.

graduate with a Bachelor of Arts from Montreal’s McGill University. In 1935, she joined her father and brother in Hong Kong, taking up a teaching position at a girls’ school.<sup>28</sup> Another female graduate was Fannie Lee Mark, who generally went by the name Fan Lee. She had a Bachelors from an affiliate of the University of Toronto and, after migrating to Hong Kong in 1930, had taken charge of physical education at the University of Hong Kong and at two schools.<sup>29</sup> Noreen Lum was matron at a private hospital; in 1934 a training school for midwives was opened and the owner credited her with its success and gave her the responsibility of organising the hospital in readiness for war.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, Katie Toots Wong, one of the 1935 Club Secretaries, left her job as a stenographer with the Chinese Maritime Customs when she married and it is probable that the majority of Chinese Canadian women were homemakers, in accordance with the ideas of most communities at the time.<sup>31</sup>

Canadian Chinese men included an influential cohort of painters. Club founder Lee Yook-tong was one of five graduates of the Ontario Art College active in the colony during the 1930s.<sup>32</sup> Although he found it hard to make a living in Hong Kong, the best known in Canada was Yee Bon who was the first Chinese artist to have exhibited at the National Gallery in Ottawa.<sup>33</sup> In 1918, at the age of thirteen, Yee had followed his father from Guangdong Province to Canada. The elder Yee returned to China to buy land with the money he had made but cut off his son financially when he insisted on continuing to paint instead of going into business. Yee went to Hong Kong in 1935 and, alongside fellow Ontario graduate Lee Byng, became an

<sup>28</sup> “Estate Administration,” *SCMP*, 2 April 1949, 3.

<sup>29</sup> “They Saw the Japs Take Hong Kong,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, 3 February 1944, 13.

<sup>30</sup> “Visit to Hospital,” *SCMP*, 4 March 1947, 3; “Nurses Graduate,” *SCMP*, 6 November 1940, 5; and Li Shu-fan, *Hong Kong Surgeon* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1964), 95.

<sup>31</sup> “20343: Wong, Katie Toots (Miss),” Chinese Maritime Customs Service record, China Families, accessed 10 May 2020, <https://www.chinafamilies.net/customs-service/20343-wong-katie-toots-miss/>; and “Bridesmaid Becomes Bride,” *SCMP*, 6 June 1938, 5.

<sup>32</sup> “Hongkong Art,” *SCMP*, 14 March 1938, 4.

<sup>33</sup> “Working Artists Guild,” *SCMP*, 21 October 1936, 11; and “World of Women,” *SCMP*, 24 October 1936, 9.

important component of the colony's multi-ethnic art scene, painting and teaching from his own studio.<sup>34</sup>

The community was economically as well as culturally significant, as it included a number of merchants and property holders as well as managers and professionals. Yip Ting-sam owned one of the largest flour dealerships on the south China coast; his sons took over the business on his death in 1938.<sup>35</sup> The father of William Gun Chong emigrated from a small village to Vancouver, where he worked for \$5 a month. After making a fortune in real estate, he bought several houses in south China and in Hong Kong, where he returned to live with his daughter. On his death in 1941, the younger Chong, who had wanted to but was denied enlistment in the Canadian Army, travelled to help settle his estate and was soon caught up in the Japanese attack.<sup>36</sup> Club officials seem to have been drawn mainly from the middle-class members. Yook-tong was also the Chinese agent for the CPR until his death in 1940.<sup>37</sup> George Chow, who was president of the Club on three occasions, was born in 1911 in Moose Jaw. In his early twenties he migrated to Hong Kong, where he became credit manager for an American bank.<sup>38</sup> Other professionals included radio engineer Enoch Bunn, who was born in Vancouver, although his family was in Hong Kong as early as 1919.<sup>39</sup> Canadian Chinese representation on the colony's medical register matched that of European Canadians.<sup>40</sup> Dr. Roy Mar (son of Mar Joe, a cook at Winnipeg General Hospital) was registered in Hong Kong in February 1938, after fleeing there from Nanjing where he had been working in a hospital when the Japanese bombed that city three months previously.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Hong Kong Museum of Art, Newsletter, 5 June 1991, 11, accessed 6 June 2020, [https://www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/Museum/Arts/artportal/news/1991\\_may-jun\\_newsletter.pdf](https://www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/Museum/Arts/artportal/news/1991_may-jun_newsletter.pdf); and "In Honour of Hong Kong's Legendary Painter," *SCMP*, 13 December 1996, 80.

<sup>35</sup> "Death of Mr. Yip Ting-sam," *Hong Kong Daily Press*, 5 May 1938, 1.

<sup>36</sup> "Bill Chong," *Memoirs and Diaries*, 1-2, Elizabeth Ride Archive, accessed 8 June 2019, <https://www.elizabethridearchive.com/memoirs>.

<sup>37</sup> "Chinese Shipping Agent," *SCMP*, 12 December 1940, 8.

<sup>38</sup> "Chows donate to cultural centre association," posted 15 December 2019 by Jody Paterson, accessed 10 February 2020, accessed through Ancestry.com.

<sup>39</sup> Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at Seattle, Washington, NAI Number: 4449160, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., accessed 3 January 2020, accessed through Ancestry.com.

<sup>40</sup> "Persons Qualified to Practice Medicine and Surgery Generally," *Hong Kong Government Gazette*, No. 558, 9 May 1941, 704.

<sup>41</sup> "Winnipeggers in Danger Zone," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 23 November 1937, 3.

## EUROPEAN CANADIANS

There were roughly ninety European Canadians in Hong Kong when it fell to the Japanese on 25 December 1941. The community consisted largely of businessmen, professionals and ecclesiastics. The Trade Commission, under Paul V. McLane, oversaw Canadian business interests. Perhaps the most important company McLane represented was the CPR, whose Hong Kong branch was managed by Thomas Christopher Monaghan, a Canadian of Irish heritage. There were other businessmen, such as Benjamin Proulx, a stockbroker and amateur jockey, and a number of medical professionals and civil servants, but the best-known European Canadian was the unique and unclassifiable Morris Abraham ‘Two Gun’ Cohen.

Cohen was born in Poland in 1877 and arrived in Wapella, Saskatchewan in 1905, by way of minor criminality in East London and a spell at reform school.<sup>42</sup> Influenced by the fervent politics of a Chinese friend, he went to China in 1922 and soon found himself working for Sun Yat-sen as a bodyguard and military trainer.<sup>43</sup> After Sun’s death in 1925, he served various Nationalist leaders, while also acting as an arms dealer and intelligence operative for the British. This, and his work for the Chinese after the Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1937, was to put him at personal risk after the surrender.

Most Canadian ecclesiastics were Catholic, although one missionary was a Pentecostal<sup>44</sup> and Harold and Frances Collier were connected with a conservative Evangelical group.<sup>45</sup> The highest-ranking Catholic was the Ottawa-born Bishop Cuthbert O’Gara, who had served in the Chinese missions since 1924.<sup>46</sup> Father Charles Basil Murphy had been sent by the Scarborough Foreign Missions to China, but at the time of the Japanese attack he was living at the Maryknoll

<sup>42</sup> Levy, *Two-Gun Cohen*, Chapters 3 and 4 passim and Location 948, Kindle.

<sup>43</sup> Levy, *Two-Gun Cohen*, Location 1642, 2858 ff., Kindle.

<sup>44</sup> “John Rutherford Spence (1880-1976),” WikiTree, last modified 17 January 2018, accessed 6 June 2020, [https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Spence-3160#John.27s\\_Timeline](https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Spence-3160#John.27s_Timeline).

<sup>45</sup> F. D. Collier and H. F. Collier, *Covered Up in Kowloon or “Kept by The Power of God”* (St. Louis, MO: Bible Truth Publishers, 1947), passim.

<sup>46</sup> Robert E. Carbonneau, “The Department of External Affairs and the Release of Bishop O’Gara from Chinese Prison, 1951-1953,” *Canadian Catholic Historical Association, Historical Studies* 63 (1997): 104.

Mission and his fate became intertwined with the Americans.<sup>47</sup> Amongst the Canadian missionaries, women outnumbered men as there were nine French Canadian sisters.<sup>48</sup> Secular women workers included Elvie Arnold, a clerk in the Canadian Trade Commissioner's Office,<sup>49</sup> and Nell Elliott, a social worker at a time when there were few of that profession in Hong Kong.<sup>50</sup> Some women were in the colony because of their husbands' jobs, like Audrey Camidge who was married to a British banker.<sup>51</sup>

### **CONVERGING EXPERIENCES: CHINESE AND EUROPEAN CANADIANS DURING THE HOSTILITIES**

Even before the outbreak of war, the Canadians were faced with a choice. The Compulsory Service Ordinance of 28 July 1939 compelled British subjects of European origin to join the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Force (HKVDC) or one of two "Essential Services" groups.<sup>52</sup> Canadian citizens were not covered by the Ordinance, but some decided to volunteer in a civilian or military capacity.

George Chow had joined the HKVDC seven years earlier. His unit, the 5th Anti-Aircraft Battery, was in the front line when the Japanese landed on Hong Kong Island late on 18 December 1941. Members of this unit were the victims of the first massacre of the invasion<sup>53</sup> and Chow was in charge of a burial party that found twenty-four of these men bayoneted in the back.<sup>54</sup> Another HKVDC man was Sonny Ng Wah Chung, who came to Hong Kong in 1937

<sup>47</sup> Ed Binns, "Father Charles Murphy and Hong Kong," *Cape Breton's Magazine*, 1 January 1993, 62, 78.

<sup>48</sup> "Local Missionary Nun's Death in Canton Told," *The Montreal Gazette*, 1 December 1945, accessed 1 January 2019, accessed through Gwulo: Old Hong Kong, <https://gwulo.com/node/28900>.

<sup>49</sup> "Interrogation of Canadian Repatriates Aboard Gripsholm," 26 August 1942, 7-8, RG24, vol. 11923, file 09-6, Library and Archives Canada [LAC].

<sup>50</sup> "Nell E. Elliott," Gwulo: Old Hong Kong, accessed 2 December 2019, <https://gwulo.com/node/20063>.

<sup>51</sup> "Local Weddings: Camidge-Howe," SCMP, 11 December 1924, 8.

<sup>52</sup> Hong Kong Legislative Council Minutes, 20 July 1939, 85, *Hong Kong Hansard*, Hong Kong Government Records Online.

<sup>53</sup> Tony Banham, *Not the Slightest Chance: The Defence of Hong Kong, 1941* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), 305-06.

<sup>54</sup> "Have Many Scores to Settle with Japanese, Chinese Say," *Hamilton Spectator*, 14 March 1944, 7, 9.

and ran an electrical and radio repair establishment.<sup>55</sup> Benny Proulx had been in the Far East for twenty-one years and considered Hong Kong his home. He was a member of the Volunteer Naval Reserve, in which capacity he fought at a number of locations until the surrender. The day before the Japanese attack, Thomas Monaghan joined up, becoming Private 770.<sup>56</sup> At some point he was wounded and the conclusion of the hostilities found him in Bowen Road Military Hospital.<sup>57</sup> Morris Cohen was not in the HKVDC, but he worked with the local Chinese Nationalists to neutralise the extensive Chinese Fifth Column.<sup>58</sup> Francis Kendall was in a similar position; he ran a special forces group, Z Force, which worked behind enemy lines.<sup>59</sup>

Non-military service was offered by Father Murphy, who was placed in charge of a dispersal area for refugees on the Stanley Peninsula.<sup>60</sup> Mary Constance Fairburn had been evacuated alongside British women and children in the summer of 1940, actually reaching Vancouver, but decided to return to Hong Kong to be with her husband. She served in the Nursing Detachment of the HKVDC,<sup>61</sup> as did Audrey Camidge, Hermione Oppen and Florence Needham.<sup>62</sup> On the day of the attack, Fan Lee, who had some medical training, offered to nurse in Kowloon thus joining the other Canadian women as a medical volunteer.<sup>63</sup> Elsie Wong, who had gone to Hong Kong

<sup>55</sup> “Mishap Ends Fatally,” *SCMP*, 6 September 1945, 3.

<sup>56</sup> Certificate of Service of Thomas Christopher Monaghan (HKVDC), kindly provided by Sandra Neal, email to author, 3 August 2012.

<sup>57</sup> “Summary of Examination of Captain Rudy Choy,” 29 May 1946, 1, MG30 E567, vol. 2, file 4, Canadian Army War Crimes Liaison Detachment Hong Kong - Personnel and Cases - T. C. Monaghan (HK-2-M-2), LAC.

<sup>58</sup> Charles Drage, *The Life and Times of General Two-Gun Cohen* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1954), 286.

<sup>59</sup> Anne Ozorio, “The Myth of Unpreparedness: The Origins of Anti-Japanese Resistance in Prewar Hong Kong,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch* 42 (2002): 167-71.

<sup>60</sup> “British Losses Less than 3,000 in Fall of Hong Kong, Priest Says,” *Montreal Gazette*, 2 December 1943, 7.

<sup>61</sup> Stephen Hume, “In Search of Mrs. G. C. Fairburn,” *Vancouver Sun*, 24 December 2011, accessed 2 December 2019, <https://www.pressreader.com/canada/vancouver-sun/20111224/283682591484406>.

<sup>62</sup> Camidge: “Auxiliary Nursing,” *SCMP*, 15 March 1940, 5; Oppen: “Provisional Lists - Staff at St. Paul’s Hospital,” HKRS112-1-1, Hong Kong General Records Service [GRS]; and Needham: Tony Banham, “Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps,” *Hong Kong War Diary*, accessed 2 December 2019, [http://www.hongkongwardiary.com/searchgarrison/hkvdc.html#\\_ftnref125](http://www.hongkongwardiary.com/searchgarrison/hkvdc.html#_ftnref125).

<sup>63</sup> “They Saw the Japs Take Hong Kong,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, 3 February 1944, 13.

to train as a nurse because she was denied study opportunities in British Columbia, qualified just before the war and was later awarded the Defence Medal for her work during the hostilities.<sup>64</sup> For those European and Chinese Canadians not directly involved in the war effort, the experience of the hostilities was identical: fear as Japanese shells and bombs prepared the way for the arrival of the conquerors themselves and deprivation as food became harder to acquire.

## DILEMMAS OF OCCUPATION

### *WHERE BEST TO SURVIVE?*

Hong Kong surrendered on Christmas Day 1941 and the Japanese forces began to take over the island on the next day. The fate of the two communities diverged again, although everyone in the three situations occupied by Canadians after the surrender—prisoner of war (POW) camp, civilian internment camp or ‘free’ in town—suffered intense deprivation and continuing fear.

On 4 January 1942, the Japanese registered European civilians from hostile nations and, after a period of discomfort and confusion in squalid waterfront hotels, most of them found themselves in Stanley Civilian Internment Camp on the island’s south western peninsula. Chinese, including those of Canadian nationality, were not interned.

For the small number of civilians who for various reasons were allowed a choice, opinions differed as to the advantages of remaining outside Stanley Camp. Most Canadians in that position opted to avoid internment. Frank Benoist had been invalidated out of the Chinese Maritime Customs in 1939. The Japanese allowed him to remain outside Stanley for unknown reasons; he lived in town with his wife Nella Bowen, a woman of African-Caribbean heritage, and three children, one from a previous marriage.<sup>65</sup> Audrey Camidge stayed with her British husband, one of about sixty bankers kept in town to provide services for the population while helping the Japanese wind

<sup>64</sup> Wong, *The Dragon and the Maple Leaf*, 8.

<sup>65</sup> “20371: Benoist, F.,” Chinese Maritime Customs Service record, China Families, accessed 2 February 2019, [https://www.chinafamilies.net/customs\\_service/20371-benoist-f/](https://www.chinafamilies.net/customs_service/20371-benoist-f/); and “About Us – Nella Anne Bowen,” Benoist.ca Family Blog, accessed 2 February 2019, <http://benoist.ca/>.

up their banks. Elvie Arnold was one of a number of Allied civilians who were kept uninterned to help the Japanese restore normal facilities; she worked in the radio studio until 28 June 1942, when she was repatriated with other Canadians in the Trade Mission.<sup>66</sup> Bishop O’Gara was held in Stanley initially but was released on 26 May 1942.<sup>67</sup> Thomas Monaghan, as part of the HKVDC, should have spent the war in a POW camp. There are various accounts of how he avoided that fate, but they all involve him winning temporary freedom and the chance to resume civilian status through the help of the neutral Irish Jesuits.<sup>68</sup> He then set out to acquire neutral status through Irish documentation.<sup>69</sup> With his pre-war employment gone and like many others he opted to become a broker, putting together buyers and sellers in a chaotic retail market.<sup>70</sup>

The majority of European Canadians had no way of avoiding internment, although they were eventually to find that camp was a better place to be than town. Maru Robbins realised this quickly; allowed freedom as a Russian, she pushed her daughter in a pram to Stanley to join her husband because she judged it unsafe for a woman to be on her own in town, where criminal violence from a desperate population and the unpredictability of the Japanese military posed a double threat.<sup>71</sup> Conditions in Stanley were hard for the first three months or so, but eventually the food supply improved and the internees’ own efforts produced order out of the original chaos.<sup>72</sup> Rations there, although never adequate,<sup>73</sup> were provided regularly and

<sup>66</sup> “Interrogation of Canadian Repatriates aboard Gripsholm,” 26 August 1942, 7-8, RG24, vol. 11923, file 09-6, LAC.

<sup>67</sup> Eric MacNider, wartime diary, 26 May 1942, accessed through Gwulo: Old Hong Kong, <https://gwulo.com/node/32386>.

<sup>68</sup> Michael Monaghan, “Thomas Christopher Monaghan,” biographical notes prepared in 2004 and kindly supplied by Michael Monaghan, email to author, 11 December 2012; “Notes Prepared by Kennedy-Skipton at Chungking – 22nd April,” 1943, 3, RG25, vol. 2971, Interim Box 311, file 3295-B-40, LAC; and *The Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph*, 29 or 30 May 1946, cutting supplied by Michael Monaghan.

<sup>69</sup> Father Edward Bourke, “Steering Neutral in Troubled Waters Hong Kong 1941-1945,” n.d., 6, HKMS 100-1-6, GRS.

<sup>70</sup> “A Wartime Profession,” *Hongkong News*, 25 December 1942, 18.

<sup>71</sup> David K. Dorward, “The Best and Worst of Times,” F.L.A.S.H., 2011, accessed 19 March 2018, <http://www.hillmanweb.com/rcn/hk/1202.html>.

<sup>72</sup> Geoffery Charles Emerson, *Hong Kong Internment, 1942-1945: Life in the Japanese Civilian Camp at Stanley* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), Location 1414-1495, Kindle edition.

<sup>73</sup> Emerson, *Hong Kong Internment*, Location 2400-2706, Kindle.

without charge, while in town rations only meant the right to buy stipulated amounts of foodstuff with one's own money. Further, the extra freedom in town, which was an important factor in the decision to remain unconfined, meant more suspicion from the Kempeitai—almost universally referred to as “the Japanese Gestapo”—and more opportunity to undertake resistance activities, with a proportionally higher number paying the price of imprisonment, torture and execution. The possibility of falling into the hands of the Kempeitai meant deciding *where* in town to live could also be a dilemma. Daisy Woo and her brother William were caring for their aged and almost blind father at the start of the occupation when all three were evicted because the Japanese wanted to take over the houses in their area. On 1 January 1942 they went to live with a friend, but as their house was not actually requisitioned, William and his father returned. Daisy, however, stayed away for a time because she feared being too close to the Kempeitai.<sup>74</sup>

#### *ESCAPE, REPATRIATION OR STAYING ON?*

Broadly speaking, the ruling Japanese treated Hong Kong's Chinese population more harshly than they did Europeans, but a regime characterised by inconsistency did sometimes act in accordance with its professed aim of freeing Asians from European racism. One beneficiary of this was Sonny Chung, who was amnestied alongside other ethnic Chinese POWs in October 1942.<sup>75</sup> No other Canadian Chinese were as lucky, but, whether in POW camps or in town, freedom was possible if they were willing to mount an escape. Getting out of Hong Kong was relatively easy for Chinese in the early days of Japanese rule,<sup>76</sup> although this does not mean that the decision to leave could be taken lightly. The painter Yee Bon chose the least arduous route, taking the ferry to Macau, where he remained throughout the occupation. However, this option meant either throwing oneself on the mercy of the authorities or finding

<sup>74</sup> “Contested Will,” *SCMP*, 1 April 1949, 5.

<sup>75</sup> “Mishap Ends Fatally,” *SCMP*, 6 September 1945, 3.

<sup>76</sup> The first two Canadians to leave after the surrender were Europeans, HKVDC man Alan Marchant and special forces operative Francis Kendall, who escaped before imprisonment: Tim Luard, *Escape from Hong Kong: Admiral Chan Chak's Christmas Day Dash, 1941* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 136.

work in an overcrowded and economically strained colony. Luckily, unlike other artists who fled to the neutral enclave, Yee Bon was able to continue painting.<sup>77</sup> The overland journey to safety—taken by his friend Lee Byng, who fled to the East River area and became a teacher—was exhausting and dangerous, as the routes were infested by bandits. Nevertheless, for those Canadian Chinese civilians who were bold, fit and well-financed, escape was possible by disguising their nationality and, where relevant, their professional status, as the Japanese sometimes tried to prevent people who might have useful skills from leaving Hong Kong. Elsie Wong’s brother, David, for example, was forbidden to depart because he was a surgeon.<sup>78</sup> Two parties consisting primarily of members of the Bunn and Mark families reached Chungking in spring 1942; they included two women and Enoch Bunn, a radio engineer.<sup>79</sup> It is unlikely that the Japanese knew that this was his trade and his skills proved useful in the last two years of the war when he acted as a radio operator on American flights over the Himalayas.<sup>80</sup>

Escaping from a POW camp was of course much harder than leaving town, but for George Chow, leaving Sham Shui Po Camp proved easier than returning to Canada. Chow used his Chinese ethnicity to facilitate an escape on 30 January 1942, six days after a visit from his fiancée Fan Lee. The hospital where Lee was nursing had been taken over by the Japanese after Kowloon was abandoned on 12 December. The staff were not allowed to use torches at night in case they sent messages to the defenders on the island, which made treatment difficult. Eventually the matron told Lee to escape. She left the next day, disguised as a Chinese labourer, and began a courageous search for Chow. As she made her way around Kowloon, she was slapped for not bowing low enough to an officer, threatened with a bayonet and almost shot.<sup>81</sup> Eventually she learnt that Chow was in Sham Shui Po and managed to see him through the fence, although the couple were not allowed to speak to each other. Chow was tormented by the thought of her vulnerability and decided to

<sup>77</sup> “Yee Bon – Lot Essay,” Christie’s, 30 May 2010, accessed 14 November 2018, <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-5323124>.

<sup>78</sup> Wong, *The Dragon and the Maple Leaf*, 12.

<sup>79</sup> “Say Canadians at Hong Kong Better Fed,” *Ottawa Journal*, 1 April 1942, 1, 13; and “World Happenings Briefly Told,” *Rosburn Review*, 21 May 1942, 12.

<sup>80</sup> Wong, *The Dragon and the Maple Leaf*, 26.

<sup>81</sup> “They Saw the Japs Take Hong Kong,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, 3 February 1944, 13.

risk an escape. On 30 January, he appeared at the fence with a few friends, dressed in a singlet and khaki shorts. The wire had already been loosened and while the two patrolling sentries were distracted, Chow slipped under and, his presence masked by a throng of probably pre-arranged visitors, disappeared into the tenements nearby. On St. Valentine's Day 1942, Chow and Lee were married by a minister in Kowloon, but their position was still difficult as another impediment to escaping was the cost of the long journey into Free China and, in their case, onwards to Canada. Returning to the bank was too risky, so Chow was forced to accept employment as an English-language announcer on Radio Hongkong. Eventually a Japanese decision to compensate dismissed bank employees provided the funds to take the couple as far as Chongqing, the capital of Free China. However, they were forced to remain there for almost a year before saving enough to return to Canada.<sup>82</sup>

Escape was harder for Europeans, but not impossible. Benny Proulx's calculation was simple: whatever the risks of the attempt, they were worth running because conditions in the POW camps would kill him in six months anyway. In the early morning of 28 January 1942, Proulx led a small party through the sewers connected to North Point POW camp to eventual freedom.<sup>83</sup> Not everyone saw things the same way. Morris Cohen was incarcerated with the majority of European Canadians in Stanley Camp. In March 1942 his reputation as a reliable enemy of the Japanese led to an offer to join an escape party, but he declined on grounds of age and health.<sup>84</sup>

Thomas Monaghan's neutral papers status gave him excellent prospects for getting to Macau with Japanese permission and then moving onwards to Free China, but it is probable that he turned down an even better opportunity to leave Hong Kong—one without any risk at all. In June 1942, half a dozen spots were given to Canadians

<sup>82</sup> "Have Many Scores to Settle with Japanese, Chinese Say," *Hamilton Spectator*, 14 March 1944, 7, 9; "Escapes Japs to Marry his Sweetheart," *Lethbridge Herald*, 6 February 1943, 18; "They Saw the Japs Take Hong Kong," *Winnipeg Tribune*, 3 February 1944, 13; "Tells of Escape from Hong Kong," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 5 February 1943, 1, 4; David Bosanquet, *Escape through China: Survival after the Fall of Hong Kong* (London: Robert Hale, 1983), 53; and "Romance Blossoms amid War for Devoted Chinese Couple," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 3 February 1944, 7.

<sup>83</sup> Benjamin A. Proulx, *Underground from Hongkong* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1943), 161-65, 171-73.

<sup>84</sup> Israel Epstein, *My China Eye: Memoirs of a Jew and a Journalist* (San Francisco: Long River Press, 2005), 142.

connected with the Trade Commission to make up numbers in an Asia-wide Japanese-American exchange; as a senior businessman he had the promise of one of these places but, while on a trip to Macau, he was persuaded to stay in Hong Kong to gather intelligence instead of sailing to safety.<sup>85</sup> This decision did not mean his dilemma had come to an end—his name was on a list of Canadians wishing to be repatriated supplied by one of those who left in June 1942.<sup>86</sup> As late as April 1943 an escapee who had been in the brokerage business with him felt he would probably go to Macau if either the CPR or the British Government would help him onwards to India.<sup>87</sup> The documentation points to a struggle between his natural desire to be home safe with his family and his determination to do all in his power for the Allied war effort.

The European Canadians in Stanley were given the chance to join a second American repatriation in September 1943. It might be thought that the offer of a risk-free return to comfort and safety would not pose a dilemma for people whose possible contribution to Allied victory was minimal, but surprisingly there were some who wavered and others who chose to remain. Hermena Oppen was on a 1942 list of those not desiring repatriation but eventually accepted it, perhaps because her British husband was allowed to join her.<sup>88</sup> Banker George Andrew and HKVDC nurse Gladys Collard were on the same list but also had a change of heart, as did four of the nine missionary sisters. Five still chose to stay, but as four were soon freed and one of this number was sent by the Church to Canton, it is possible all nine were acting under instruction from their superiors.<sup>89</sup> Civil servant Clifton Large was romantically attached to an English girl and when he opted to stay with her, his parents decided to remain too. The

<sup>85</sup> For this family tradition and its probable origins in Monaghan himself, see Brian Edgar “Thomas Christopher Monaghan’s Resistance Work,” *The Dark World’s Fire: Tom and Lena Edgar in War*, 8 July 2012, last modified 7 August 2012, <https://brianedgar.wordpress.com/2012/08/07/thomas-christopher-monaghans-resistance-work/>.

<sup>86</sup> “Canadians in Hong Kong Wishing to be Repatriated to Canada,” 10 August 1942, RG25, vol. 29721, file 3295-B-40, LAC; and “Letter to the Canadian Legation in Brazil,” 10 August 1942, RG25, vol. 29721, file 3295-B-40, LAC.

<sup>87</sup> “Notes Prepared by Kennedy-Skipton at Chungking – 22 April,” 1943, 3-4, RG25, vol. 2971, Interim Box 311, LAC.

<sup>88</sup> “Canadians in Camp who at the Moment do not Wish Repatriation,” 10 August 1942, RG25, vol. 29721, LAC.

<sup>89</sup> “Local Missionary Nun’s Death in Canton Told,” *Montreal Gazette*, 1 December 1945, 3.

documentation suggests previous wavering about repatriation, so it seems that the relationship led to a firm decision.<sup>90</sup> David Drummond of the CPR also remained in Hong Kong, perhaps because his British-born wife, who he had married in Stanley a year earlier, was not as lucky as Mr. Oppen.<sup>91</sup> Two Canadians made difficult decisions to leave Hong Kong. David Fyffe had separated from his wife in early 1943; he accepted repatriation without her and their daughter born in Stanley in July 1942.<sup>92</sup> Father Charles Murphy had served as the chairman of the Canadian Committee in camp as well as carrying out pastoral duties among Stanley's Catholics.<sup>93</sup> His wish to continue his work was thwarted by ill health and he accepted repatriation with great reluctance.<sup>94</sup>

The Canadian Chinese would doubtless have been glad to be offered the dilemma faced by the Europeans. Just before the exchange, Daisy Woo was told that interested Canadians should register with the Swiss representative. She passed on the news to Harold and Frances Collier, promising to add their names too. However, the next time they met she informed them that the list had already been sent off and they would all have to wait for another ship. The situation was reversed in the case of the Colliers, either because an Austrian friend had given their details to the Swiss representative or because their existence was already known to Ottawa through their church, and their names were added to the repatriation list.<sup>95</sup> But for Woo, another ship did not arrive until after the war and the question arises: were Canadian Chinese deliberately excluded?

There was no absolute ban, as Lily and Merry Chow from Calgary—two students who had gone to Hong Kong to learn Chinese—were among those repatriated. Merry Chow, alongside

<sup>90</sup> Barbara Anslow, *Tin Hats and Rice: A Diary of Life as a Hong Kong Prisoner of War 1941-1945* (Hong Kong: Blacksmith Books, 2018), 162, 171; and "Canadians in Camp," 10 August 1942, RG25, vol. 29721, LAC.

<sup>91</sup> Eric MacNider, wartime diary, 25 August 1942, accessed through Gwulo: Old Hong Kong; and "Ottawa Man Describes Life in Japanese Camp," *Ottawa Evening Citizen*, 6 December 1943, 3.

<sup>92</sup> Anslow, *Tin Hats & Rice*, 314.

<sup>93</sup> "British Losses Less than 3,000 in Fall of Hong Kong, Priest Says," *Montreal Gazette*, 2 December 1943, 7.

<sup>94</sup> Mabel Winifred Redwood, *It Was Like This* (Frinton-on-Sea: Barbara Anslow, 2001), 152.

<sup>95</sup> Collier and Collier, *Covered Up in Kowloon*, 104-07; and Sheila A. to L. Ride, letter, 27 September 1942, RG25, vol. 29721, file 3295-B-40, LAC.

Frank Benoist's daughter Louise, had been part of a group of young women who had hidden in a school swimming pool to avoid Japanese soldiers during the dangerous first days of the occupation.<sup>96</sup> Louise and her two brothers were also on the repatriation ship *Teia Maru* when it left Hong Kong on 23 September 1943, as was Nella Benoist, although none of the four were fully ethnically European.<sup>97</sup> It is perhaps significant that the Chows were included by Bennie Proulx in a list he provided after his escape, so the authorities knew where to find them.<sup>98</sup> It was much easier to organise repatriation for the Europeans who were almost all in Stanley and, as we have seen, the unconfined Colliers almost missed out. Further research is necessary in order to determine the reason for the fact that only a small number of non-Europeans were repatriated.

#### THE QUESTION OF KINDNESS

Some people felt that the harsh conditions of the occupation meant that all of their efforts should go towards maximising the chances of survival for themselves and their families. Some Stanley internees went beyond that: there is ample evidence of theft, of kitchen staff appropriating communal food and even of people informing on their fellow internees for reward. Nevertheless, given the stresses of overcrowding, fear and inadequate diet, the overall record is better than might have been expected. Accounts of generosity, concern for others and unselfish work for the common good are just as frequent.<sup>99</sup> Morris Cohen provides a good example of this. He was not above tricking other internees out of tobacco, but he also continued his well-known pre-war hospitality under very different circumstances, with acts of striking generosity to the women and children of Stanley.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>96</sup> “Home Again from the Orient,” *Shoal Lake Star*, 16 December 1943, 3.

<sup>97</sup> “About Us – Nella Anne Bowen,” Benoist.ca Family Blog, accessed 2 February 2019, <http://benoist.ca/>; and “Gripsholm, manifest (1943),” Arrival: New York, accessed through Ancestry.com

<sup>98</sup> “List accompanying Letter from B. A. Proulx to Mr Collins, July 25th 1942,” RG25, vol. 2971, Interim Box 311, file 3295-B-40, LAC.

<sup>99</sup> John Luff, *The Hidden Years* (Hong Kong: South China Morning Post, Limited, 1967), 184.

<sup>100</sup> George Wright-Nooth with Mark Adkin, *Prisoner of the Turnip Heads: Horror, Hunger and Humour in Hong Kong, 1941-1945* (London: Leo Cooper, 1994), 220; and Levy, *Two-Gun Cohen*, Location 5299, Kindle.

Cohen's lifelong skills as a scrounger, his contacts outside the camp and the friendship of a Japanese businessman enabled him to mount something like a systematic campaign to bring in extra food.<sup>101</sup>

The same dilemma was faced by those in town. Insight into the way the occupation recalibrated moral sensibility is given by the Colliers, missionaries who remained uninterred in their Kowloon flat largely by accident. When the Japanese introduced a water charge and turned off the taps until it was paid, the hard-up couple faced a problem later solved by a faulty valve delivering them a free supply. Mrs. Collier's conscience was bothered by the thought that this was in effect theft, but after some reflection her husband decided that the water was provided by divine intervention in answer to prayers.<sup>102</sup> The Colliers' survival depended on the kindness of Chinese Christians<sup>103</sup> and this reversal of ethnic power was typical—Europeans now relied on their former subalterns to support and succour them. After his escape from Sham Shui Po, George Chow took a further risk, delivering a message to a business colleague about some English POWs at a time when he could not have been certain about who could be trusted.<sup>104</sup> Fan Lee tried to provide iodine and other medical supplies for one of the camps, but she was thwarted by the Japanese, who took the supplies for themselves.<sup>105</sup>

Some Europeans, however, although still broadly dependent on people of other ethnicities, were able to help others, particularly if they had acquired a neutral passport. Thomas Monaghan had shown a humanitarian commitment before the occupation, donating surplus CPR food to a committee tasked with feeding the refugees fleeing to Hong Kong from the Sino-Japanese War.<sup>106</sup> After becoming treasurer of the Irish Committee, he was active in sending relief to the Irish in Stanley, who paid a "warm tribute" to his memory at the end of the war.<sup>107</sup> He also provided supplies for interned Irish policemen and

<sup>101</sup> Drage, *Two-Gun Cohen*, 300-04.

<sup>102</sup> Collier and Collier, *Covered Up in Kowloon*, 58-59.

<sup>103</sup> Collier and Collier, *Covered Up in Kowloon*, 80.

<sup>104</sup> Bosanquet, *Escape through China*, 53.

<sup>105</sup> "Have Many Scores to Settle with Japanese, Chinese Say," *Hamilton Spectator*, 14 March 1944, 7, 9.

<sup>106</sup> Monaghan, "Thomas Christopher Monaghan."

<sup>107</sup> "Letter of G. P. Murphy and W. O'Neill to Patrick Joy," 6 October 1945, IE JA MSSN/HONG KONG/118, Irish Jesuit Archives, Dublin [IJA].

was eventually allowed by the Japanese to do the same for POWs.<sup>108</sup> Monaghan did not confine himself to such authorised activity. Some of the money he raised as a broker was used to buy medical supplies, food, clothing and comforts, all of which were smuggled into the camps. At one point he received funds for this purpose from British Consul John Reeves in Macau.<sup>109</sup> Busy as this must have kept him, it was primarily resistance work that detained him in Hong Kong.

#### RESISTANCE OR ACQUIESCENCE?

Illegal relief was risky, but the Japanese did not treat humanitarian breaches of the law as harshly as acts that threatened their economic, political or military power. When two British bankers were arrested in March 1943 for smuggling relief funds into Stanley, they were subjected to almost no mistreatment during interrogation, whereas a fellow banker charged with secretly monitoring the financial authorities had lighted cigarettes pressed into his thighs.<sup>110</sup> Suspicion of spying nearly always meant one form or another of what is now generally called waterboarding. The humanitarian bankers were given three months, the shortest possible sentence, whereas a colleague who was caught communicating with Consul Reeves in Macau was given ten years and Monaghan and his co-conspirator Charles Hyde received the death sentence. This difference in likely outcomes was understood at the time and was a major influence on the decision as to whether to move from relief to resistance.<sup>111</sup>

It is useful to regard resistance—action with direct economic, political or military significance—as the strongest form of a range of

<sup>108</sup> “Notes Prepared by Kennedy-Skipton at Chungking – 22 April,” 1943, 3-4, RG25, vol. 2971, Interim Box 311, LAC.

<sup>109</sup> Statement of Connie Monaghan Coleman, 10 May 2006, kindly supplied by Sandra Neal; and “Quebecer’s [*sic*] Daring Exploits at Hong Kong Revealed,” *The Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph*, 29 or 30 May 1946.

<sup>110</sup> G. A. Leiper, *A Yen for my Thoughts* (Hong Kong: South China Morning Post, 1982), 197.

<sup>111</sup> Leiper, *A Yen for my Thoughts*, 197-99.

oppositional possibilities.<sup>112</sup> Even purely personal acts could demand courage and self-sacrifice. Stanley internee Hermena Oppen aroused Japanese suspicions and was summoned by them to be questioned. After she had convinced them she was not a spy, they offered her cookies and cakes but the starving internee made the “very hard decision” to refuse.<sup>113</sup> Two Canadians in the June 1942 repatriation moved further towards resistance as traditionally understood and risked their freedom, perhaps even their lives, by smuggling out sensitive material. Trade Commissioner Paul McLane took a document composed by internee leader Franklin Gimson which included plans for the restoration of British rule after Japanese defeat,<sup>114</sup> while Lt.-Col. Doughty carried a message—hidden in the heel of his shoe—giving details of the communications equipment needed to support the eventual liberation of Hong Kong.<sup>115</sup>

A number of Canadian Chinese escapees volunteered to work for the British Army Aid Group (BAAG), a British-led resistance organisation based in south China. Doctor Harry Raymond Shoon-Lee fled Hong Kong at the end of March 1942. The BAAG’s commander, Colonel (Col.) Lindsay Ride, assigned him to a medical post at Waichow where he headed a unit treating British and Chinese army personnel, Hong Kong refugees and eventually the local people. In May 1943 he was re-assigned to an area experiencing severe famine with the responsibility of establishing food kitchens and medical services.<sup>116</sup> When the Japanese attack forced William Chong to stay

<sup>112</sup> For the range of tasks traditionally considered resistance, see Olivier Wieviorka, *Une Histoire de la Résistance en Europe Occidentale 1940-1945* (Paris: Perrin, 2017), Location 2441-52, Kindle edition. For the case for widening the definition, see István Deak, *Europe on Trial* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2015), Location 437, Kindle edition; and Gilly Carr, Paul Sanders and Louise Willmot, *Protest, Defiance and Resistance in The Channel Islands: German Occupation, 1940-45* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), Location 167ff, Kindle edition.

<sup>113</sup> Hermena Jean Oppen, interview by Kelvin Chow, 17 May 1996, Sound Recordings 31A 9, Canadian War Museum.

<sup>114</sup> “Report Forwarded by P. V. McLane, 18th July 1942“, 2, CO 980/82, item 16, The National Archives, London [TNA]; and “Prisoners of War and Civil [sic] Internees Repatriations and Exchanges from Occupied Territories in Far East,” CO 980/82, item 16, 2, TNA.

<sup>115</sup> “Wartime Message was Smuggled out in Heel of Shoe,” *SCMP*, 7 July 1968, 8.

<sup>116</sup> R. H. S. Lee, “Report on the Medical Work in Toishing,” 25 June 1944, 39-40, WO 343/1/76, TNA; and “Raymond Harry Shoon Lee,” transcript of BAAG documents, 28 February 2015, accessed 14 March 2018, accessed through Gwulo: Old Hong Kong, <https://gwulo.com/node/23627>.

with his sister in Hong Kong, he observed the conquerors’ brutality and escaped to Free China to volunteer for service in the BAAG. His first task was to deliver Red Cross supplies to Chinese hospitals in areas likely to be cut off by the enemy; soon after completion of this dangerous assignment, he was sent to Macau to set up important escape and intelligence routes between the Portuguese enclave and Free China. On his return he brought with him a notebook containing important financial information from Hong Kong and the success of this second mission established him as the BAAG’s “best man” in the eyes of its commander.<sup>117</sup> He was one of the few agents trusted to carry drugs between medical posts, as their huge black market value constituted a serious temptation.<sup>118</sup> In July 1945, Chong guided an important Macanese escapee through Free China on his way to London where he had been called to help decide post-war British policy in Hong Kong. The escapee described Chong as “very helpful and resourceful” and claimed “[w]ithout him we would have been lost.”<sup>119</sup> He was captured three times during his resistance career, on one occasion coming to the brink of execution. His service continued after 1945 and, when it came to an end, he was the only BAAG volunteer to be given formal discharge papers. In 1947, Chong was awarded the British Empire Medal for his courage.<sup>120</sup>

Two European Canadians worked for the BAAG. In the preliminary stages of that organisation, Francis Kendall was selected to lead a field unit in southern China,<sup>121</sup> but his desire to work in communist-held areas aroused the suspicion of the Nationalist authorities. Col. Ride later judged that if Kendall had stayed, the

<sup>117</sup> “Bill Chong,” *Memoirs and Diaries*, 5, Elizabeth Ride Archive, accessed 8 June 2019, <https://www.elizabethridearchive.com/memoirs>.

<sup>118</sup> Wong, *The Dragon and the Maple Leaf*, 13.

<sup>119</sup> “Statement by Leo d’Almada e Castro,” 12 July 1945, 64, WO 343/1/38, TNA.

<sup>120</sup> Catherine Clement, “The Incredible WW2 Story of Intrepid Espionage Agent Bill Chong: Agent 50,” War History Online, 24 April 2018, accessed 12 March 2020, <https://www.warhistoryonline.com/guest-bloggers/bill-chong-agent-50-ww2.html>; “Bill Chong,” Veterans Affairs Canada, last modified 30 July 2019, accessed 12 March 2020, <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/those-who-served/chinese-canadian-veterans/profile/chongb>; “Stories from the Ride Collection #06 (Part 1): Bill Chong,” British Army Aid Group Facebook group, 29 October 2019, accessed 5 November 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/285906032097373/photos/a.293831767971466/427873451233063/?type=3>; and “Bill Chong,” *Memoirs and Diaries*, 9, Elizabeth Ride Archive, accessed 8 June 2019, <https://www.elizabethridearchive.com/memoirs>.

<sup>121</sup> Ride to Chu, 21 May 1942, 30, WO 343/1/5, TNA.

BAAG would never have been allowed to function.<sup>122</sup> More fruitful from Ride's perspective, although ending in personal tragedy, was the work of Thomas Monaghan. Chinese BAAG operatives began to infiltrate Hong Kong in June 1942 and coordinated local networks were established towards the end of the year. Monaghan became an agent, adopting the code name Mysterious.<sup>123</sup> He visited the Macau Consulate in January 1943 and probably also continued to send information through Consul Reeves.<sup>124</sup> His work for the BAAG was twofold. He was engaged in the basic resistance task of intelligence gathering and, although the existing records do not attribute any piece of information to him before March 1943, it is likely that he was contributing to the reports sent out by the banker Charles Hyde, in whose cell he was working.<sup>125</sup> In addition, he was organising escapes before the end of 1942. In March 1943 he planned one of particular significance.

William Vallesuk, a Russian radio engineer, was being pressured by the Japanese to hand over details of an invention with military applications. He was introduced to Monaghan, who agreed to help him leave Hong Kong. He was joined by Ragnar Brodersen and Halfdan Kvamsø, two Norwegians of combatant age with merchant seaman backgrounds. They believed that their community was about to be interned so they approached Monaghan on 3 February and were told an escape was already in the making. He kept the three participants ignorant of all arrangements until the last minute –“for which secrecy I can only commend him,” Vallesuk later said,<sup>126</sup> while Brodersen felt that he “did a magnificent job.”<sup>127</sup> The escape began at 5 p.m. on 10 February and the three men were delivered safely into the hands of the BAAG.<sup>128</sup>

On April 21, Hyde, who had helped with this enterprise, was caught trying to communicate with Indian POWs. Monaghan must

<sup>122</sup> Lindsay Ride, “B. A. A. G.,” n.d., 15, 17, WO 343/1/221, TNA.

<sup>123</sup> Monaghan, “Thomas Christopher Monaghan.”

<sup>124</sup> “Summary of Examination of Reverend P. Joy,” Trial of Noma Kennosuke, WO 235/999, TNA.

<sup>125</sup> Alan Birch and Martin Cole, *Captive Years: The Occupation of Hong Kong 1941-45* (Hong Kong: Heinemann Asia, 1982), 103-04.

<sup>126</sup> “Statement of William Vasseluk,” February 1943, 42-43, WO 343/1/184, TNA.

<sup>127</sup> Ragnar Brodersen, letter to Elizabeth Ride, 1982, extract kindly sent by email to author, 10 February 2012.

<sup>128</sup> “Report of Messrs. W. Vallesuk, H. Kvamsø, and R. Brodersen’s Escape from Hong Kong,” 16 February 1943, 44-45, WO 343/1/184, TNA.

have realised his own position was now precarious in the extreme. He could have left Hong Kong using the routes he was already operating, but chose to continue his work, telling the Jesuits he would just “slip out” if he felt the net tightening around him.<sup>129</sup> He was even considering expanding his activities, as he had been asked to take over Hyde’s work after his arrest.<sup>130</sup>

#### RESISTING INTERROGATION

Monaghan was one of three Canadian civilians who had to make the terrible decision as to whether and how to resist the brutalities of a Japanese interrogation. William Chong was beaten and questioned during one of his periods of captivity but revealed nothing on this or any other occasion. Morris Cohen was taken from Stanley on 2 February 1942 and held for eighteen days. During this time, he was questioned about his wartime activities on behalf of the Chinese Nationalists. His own account—in which he claims to have “socked” an interrogator on the jaw—is suspect, but it is certain that he was badly beaten and there is no reason to doubt his claim to have successfully denied everything.<sup>131</sup> The accounts of Monaghan’s fellow prisoners show that he too was able to avoid delivering anyone else into the hands of the Kempeitai.

Early on 24 May 1943, six Gendarmes came to Wah Yan College, where Monaghan was living with his Jesuit friends. They arrested him, Father Patrick Joy and Father Gerald Casey; both Jesuits had committed actions that aroused Japanese suspicions and were wrongly believed to be helping Monaghan in the resistance.<sup>132</sup> Monaghan’s interrogation began soon after his arrest. He was questioned about half a dozen times during the main period of investigation, being subjected to beatings and, on two occasions, water torture.<sup>133</sup> Prisoners

<sup>129</sup> Bourke, “Steering Neutral,” 18, GRS.

<sup>130</sup> “Summary of Examination of Captain Rudy Choy,” 29 May 1946, MG30 E567, vol. 2, file 4, LAC.

<sup>131</sup> Drage, *Two-Gun Cohen*, 291-92.

<sup>132</sup> Patrick Joy, “The Nightmare,” n.d., 3, Papers of Patrick Joy, S. J. (1892-1970), J53/27 (1), IE JA MSSN/HONG/ 142, IJA; and Bourke, “Steering Neutral,” 18, GRS.

<sup>133</sup> “Examination of P. W. 4 - Boris Pasco,” WO 235/937, TNA; and “Statement by Mr. Boris Pasco,” 1946, 1, MG30 E567, vol. 2, file 4, Canadian Army War Crimes Liaison Detachment Hong Kong - Personnel and Cases - T. C. Monaghan, LAC.

in cells close by heard questions about his links with the Macau Consulate.<sup>134</sup> In 1944 or 1945, a Swiss diplomat made enquiries in Tokyo on behalf of the British and was told Monaghan was executed both for espionage and for his role in organising escapes,<sup>135</sup> so at some point the Kempeitai learnt about this too. Believing rightly or wrongly he had been betrayed by Charles Hyde,<sup>136</sup> Monaghan made it his aim to incriminate no one. He adopted the strategy, common amongst those being interrogated, of appearing to cooperate by telling the Japanese what they already knew.<sup>137</sup> As part of this plan, he admitted that Reeves—beyond Japanese reach in Macau—was engaged in espionage. This was already well-known to the Japanese, but it seems that Monaghan felt guilty for even this much.<sup>138</sup> In fact, his courage and resilience saved the lives of Casey and Joy, as he was continually pressed to incriminate the two Jesuits.<sup>139</sup> He held out, betrayed no one and the priests were eventually freed after about three months confinement.<sup>140</sup> Monaghan was one of thirty-three resistance agents executed on 29 October 1943.

## CONCLUSION

The European Canadians were relatively lucky. Although Monaghan was executed and a few of the older cohort died in Stanley, most of them were repatriated after about twenty months in occupied Hong

<sup>134</sup> "Statement by Mr. Boris Pasco," 1946, 1, MG30 E567, LAC.

<sup>135</sup> (Camille) Gorgé to Berne, Telegram 283, 20 March 1945, 145/3/45, Dossier: E2001-02#1968/218#310\*, Abrechnungen für die Interessenvertretung von den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika, Swiss Federal Archives, Berne.

<sup>136</sup> See Brian Edgar "Did Charles Hyde Fool the Japanese?" The Dark World's Fire: Tom and Lena Edgar in War, 25 June 2017, <https://brianedgar.wordpress.com/2017/06/25/did-charles-hyde-fool-the-japanese/>.

<sup>137</sup> "Summary of Examination of Captain Rudy Choy," 29 May 1946, MG30 E567, LAC.

<sup>138</sup> "News of our Men in Hong Kong - Extracts from Letters Written by Father M. Bodkin, Naval Chaplain," September-October 1945, 3, IE IJA/MSSN/HONG/154, IJA; "Summary of Examination of Captain Rudy Choy," 29 May 1946, 1, MG30 E567, LAC; and "Statement by Mr. Boris Pasco," 1946, 2, MG30 E567, LAC.

<sup>139</sup> "News of our Men in Hong Kong," September-October 1945, 3, IE IJA/MSSN/HONG/154, IJA; "Statement by Mr. Boris Pasco," 1946, 2, MG30 E567, LAC; and G. H. Casey, *A Priest in a Japanese Jail*, 3rd edition (Dublin: Irish Jesuit Mission Series, 1948), 11, IE JA MSSN/HONG/ 142, IJA.

<sup>140</sup> "News of our Men in Hong Kong," September-October 1945, 3, IE IJA/MSSN/HONG/154, IJA.

Kong. Nevertheless, before they sailed home, they had faced not only deprivation and anxiety but also difficult choices. The internees have quite reasonably focused on the ways in which the conditions of their confinement robbed them of their freedom, reducing them to bored daydreamers in an ‘eventless’ world in which they were deprived of normal psychic functions like choice.<sup>141</sup> The internees were imprisoned, forced to obey their captors and given severely limited opportunities for activity. In the case of Hong Kong, those who remained outside the internment camps had greater freedom and, if they had money, more to spend it on, but they too experienced narrowed and frustrating lives. It is not surprising that accounts by survivors and historians have focused on such aspects. But in some ways the lives of the defeated would have been easier if *all* choice had been removed. As it was, they had to decide whether to be generous or selfish and how much to risk helping others. For a few people it was necessary to decide where to live and for those outside the camps whose pre-war occupations had vanished, how to earn money for their rations. For those of reasonable health and fitness, especially if they were living in town, such dilemmas were supplemented by the decision as to whether or not to undergo the risks of an escape attempt. Surprisingly, for a significant minority, even the decision as to whether or not to accept repatriation was not clear-cut. Joining the resistance, which brought the likelihood of torture and death if discovered, was perhaps the most difficult choice of all.

With a few exceptions, European Canadians spent their war in camps, while Chinese Canadians remained in town. Survival for the latter group was more difficult as they had to earn a living in the face of deteriorating economic conditions. After the escape of her brother William, Daisy Woo had sole responsibility for the care of her ailing father. She was forced to risk arrest by defying Japanese linguistic policy and secretly teaching English to pay for their rations. When her father died in May 1945, she sold a gold bangle to cover the funeral expenses.<sup>142</sup> When William returned to Montreal, he told reporters that no well-fed person could imagine what it was like to

<sup>141</sup> J. G. Ballard, *Miracles of Life: Shanghai to Shepperton an Autobiography* (London: Harper Perennial, 2008), 74; and Jean Gittins, *Stanley: Behind Barbed Wire* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1982), 34.

<sup>142</sup> “Contested Will,” *SCMP*, 1 April 1949, 5.

be hungry all the time, "day after day, month after month."<sup>143</sup> His sister continued to endure this, as well as her fear of the Kempeitai, until 16 August 1945 when the Japanese in Hong Kong acknowledged defeat. In November, the ship she had been dreaming of for two years finally arrived.<sup>144</sup>



#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Brian Edgar** has taught in universities in Britain and in China, where he was professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Yunnan. He publishes on the cultural history of psychotherapy and on Hong Kong in the 1930s and 1940s.

<sup>143</sup> "Canada 'Like Heaven' to Returned Chinaman," *Orono Weekly Times*, 18 January 1945, 8.

<sup>144</sup> "The S. S. Empire Chieftain," *SCMP*, 11 November 1945, 6.